



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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By: Kalei Rupp

### **Operation Santa Claus 2012 set to take flight**

**CAMP DENALI, Alaska** — The holidays are quickly approaching and Operation Santa Claus is gearing up to take flight in celebration.

Hundreds of children living in Alaska villages will soon be celebrating the 56th annual Operation Santa Claus. This event is part of the Alaska National Guard's yearly community relations and support program that provides toys, clothing, books, school supplies, fresh fruit and sundaes to youngsters in communities across the state.

Operation Santa Claus will be traveling to four communities this year: Northway Nov. 27, Venetie Dec. 1, Atmautluak Dec. 13 and Mekoryuk Dec. 17.

This year's events will bring Santa, Mrs. Claus and a team of elves to these villages on a variety of Santa's sleighs – an Alaska Air National Guard C-130, an Alaska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter or an Alaska Army National Guard C-23 Sherpa.

**HOW IT ALL BEGAN...**The Alaska Air National Guard originally started Operation Santa Claus in 1956 as a result of a request from St. Mary's Mission for toys for their children. Spring floods denied a fishing season that year, and the drought that followed eliminated the big game. Every bit of money the Mission had was used to pay for food to be shipped in, so it appeared there was no money to buy gifts for the children for Christmas that year.

So, Guardsmen would accept new or used toys, in those days, from members of the Anchorage community. In turn, they'd rehab used toys, then hand them over to Santa Claus for delivery aboard an Air Guard C-123J Provider.

Throughout the years, as time and social conditions in rural Alaska changed, other villages, schools and groups have invited Operation Santa Claus to their communities. Literally, tens of thousands of Alaska's children and adults have been on the receiving end of St. Nick's good cheer.

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**Seating is limited for media interested in attending. Please contact the Public Affairs Office at 428-6032 as soon as possible to secure your seat. There will not be media seats available on all four flights.**